

The Man From Coxs River

Australia. 2014. 84 mins. PG

Dir: Russell Kilby. Prod. Amy Scully

Features Luke Carlon, Chris Banffy.

Review by Ian Davidson

Every good doco has an interesting story to tell and an interesting character at its centre. THE MAN FROM COXS RIVER is no exception as well as providing periods of excitement and even suspense.

Coxs River flows through the Burragorang valley in the Blue Mountains, just 100 Km from Sydney and is part of that city's water supply.

So when there are 50 or so wild brumbies in the area that have to be moved because it is a heritage area and there is danger of the horses fouling the water, who do you call? The Man from Coxs River!

The man in the title is Luke Carlon who grew up in the area – in fact the Carlon family were pioneers in the district and ran a successful business of horseback tour riding through the area when it was crown land. But the area was later granted the status of National Park and now World Heritage, so the Carlons have had to relocate.

Interestingly, Luke's father Bert was an actor and stunt man in Charles Chauvel's 1950 "Sons of Matthew", a story about pioneers in the Australian bush – just like the Carlons – and was later recognised as assistant cameraman.

Over the year of filming MAN FROM COXS RIVER, Luke and his team, with participation from National Parks (who threw the family off their land in the first place) and the RSPCA (who are guarding the animals' welfare) were charged with the task of capturing 52 brumbies and taming them sufficiently to lead them 5 Km to the nearest access road to truck them to new homes. But is the task even feasible with all the red tape and restrictions placed in their way?

With action shots and fireside chats interwoven with historical footage and one "fly-on-the-wall" observation at the project conference room, we get a good understanding of why the brumbies have to be moved in this way and the difficulties involved.

These brumbies have rarely seen humans so are truly wild, strong and high spirited – none more so than the stallions. The mares are more stubborn and foals just as unpredictable.

This doco is highly recommended not only for its clear explanation of the program, its reasons, pitfalls and politics, but as an outright adventure story set in the true Australian bush.

You are left thinking "Is a brumby still a brumby when not in the bush?"

The DVD comes with several interesting extras.

Available from the film maker at <http://www.themanfromcoxsriver.com> for \$27.26

Or the FVFS DVD library as a free loan to members.

Screening rights payable by member film societies \$35.

FVFS score 4.2 stars (out of 5): IMDb score 7.8



Notes by Russell Kilbey

Luke Carlon grew up taking tourists on horse trips along Coxs river, a place his family has ridden since the 1820's.

Everyone came to ride along this pristine valley for up to a week including the rich and famous. All that ended nearly 20 years ago when the river was declared a wilderness area, the business closed and Luke's father died.

After a long history of difficult relations between the National Parks and the Carlons, a thoughtful National Parks Ranger Chris Banffy has a problem he thinks Luke might be able to solve.

A wiley mob of brumbies (wild horses) inhabit the Burragorang valley, a water catchment area sealed off to the general public for over fifty years. Classed as feral pests, National Parks head office needs Chris to remove the animals from Sydney's water supply without any of the outcry that has marred some previous control operations using shooters in helicopters.

Unlike any other horse relocation program in Australia the only access to the trap-yards is either by helicopter or horseback. If Luke takes the job he will have to find the horses, get them in the trap then he'll have to break them in enough to lead them a bone crunching 5 km up to another set of yards with truck access.

Can Luke prove himself to the ghosts of his past and lead the horses to safety and a new home without injuring them or his crew of dedicated stockmen? Can Ranger Chris make Luke stick to the rules? Can Luke and Chris learn to work together and see the world through the each others eyes?-

Written by Russell Kilbey

